

Suffolk bill would refund fees to drivers found not guilty

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A Suffolk legislative committee voted unanimously Tuesday for a bill that would refund a total of \$264,000 to nearly 4,700 motorists for administrative fines they paid last year on traffic tickets on which they were not guilty.

Refund checks for the \$30 and \$50 administrative fees, which will cost the county \$263,950, will be issued in September, said county spokeswoman Vanessa Baird-Streeter.

The county has halted its practice of charging administrative fees for violations such as broken taillights that are dismissed when the driver makes the repair.

Suffolk officials originally defended the fees as necessary to cover administrative costs at the Traffic and Parking Violations Agency. The county reversed course after legislators, reacting to complaints from the public, moved to ax the fees when tickets are dismissed or drivers are found not guilty.

"These refunds are about treating residents fairly," Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone said Tuesday in a statement. "If you're not on the hook for a fine, then you shouldn't have to pay an administrative fee."

The money will be transferred from within the Suffolk County Traffic and Parking Violations Agency's budget, county officials said. Legislative leaders said they expected the fee-refund bill to pass.

County Comptroller Joseph Sawicki Jr.'s staff went through traffic records to identify those who had paid the fees inappropriately.